You have downloaded a document from

The Central and Eastern European Online Library

The joined archive of hundreds of Central-, East- and South-East-European publishers, research institutes, and various content providers

Source: Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Theologia Orthodoxa

Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Orthodox Theology

Location: Romania

Author(s): Benedict (Valentin) Vesa

Title: JOSEPH HAZZAYA AND THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY

JOSEPH HAZZAYA AND THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY

Issue: 2/2017

Citation style: Benedict (Valentin) Vesa. "JOSEPH HAZZAYA AND THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY". Studia Universitatis Babes-Bolyai - Theologia Orthodoxa 2:105-118.

https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=600943

SUBBTO 62, no. 2 (2017): 105-118
DOI:10.24193/subbto.2017.2.08

JOSEPH HAZZAYA AND THE SPIRITUAL ITINERARY

BENEDICT (VALENTIN) VESA*

ABSTRACT. Joseph Hazzaya is one of the most well-known East Syriac mystics and a prolific writer, belonging to the same spiritual and theological family together with Isaac of Nineveh, Simon of Taibuteh and John Dalyatha. His name is also mentioned in the Christological debate of 786-787 in the East Syriac Church, during the time of Patriarch Timothy I, next to John the Solitary and John Dalyatha. The first chapter of this paper is dedicated to his theological biography, as revealing an important historical meeting between a scholastic-dogmatic theology and a spiritual-monastic perspective. The second section focuses on the tripartition of the spiritual life within the frame of the East Syriac ascetical tradition, in particular in reference to John the Solitary, "the father of the East Syriac spirituality". And in consequence, the third chapter connects the three-fold stages of spiritual itinerary with the monastic life, for Joseph Hazzaya was a prominent representative of this milieu and all his writings were generated in this vein. The scope of this paper is to recuperate the personality of a great mystical author banished by the 'Western' Byzantine Church because of his belonging, as well as occasionally, by his own community.

Keywords: Joseph Hazzaya, spiritual itinerary, Christology, stage, conduct.

Short Theological Biography

Joseph Hazzaya, quite unknown, at least for the Romanian theological field, is one of the most well-known East Syriac mystical writers. His writings represent a kind of synthesis and a systematisation of the East Syriac spiritual tradition. Ishodnah of Basra, in his 'Book of Chastity', dedicates a chapter to this prolific author. He was born around the first decade of the 8th century, in the city of Nimrod, in a pagan family. His father was a chief Magi. When his native city was conquered by the Arabs, he became prisoner and three years later he was sold to a Christian, named Cyriacus, in the village of Dadar, region of Qardu, south-east of today Turkey. By the influence of St. John of Kamul Monastery, he received the baptism and then

* Very Rev. Lecturer, PhD, ThD, Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Orthodox Theology. E-mail: benedict.vesa@gmail.com.

entered Abba Saliba's Monastery in the region of Bet Nuhadra. Successively, he became hermit in the mountains of Qardu, then superior of Mar Basima Monastery, hermit again in the mountains of Zinai (region of Adiabene), around the monastery of Rabban Boktisho, and then superior of this very monastery[1].

One may find his name, next to John the Solitary and John Dalyatha, in the so-called "process of mystics" ruled by Catholikos Timothy I in 786-787. Up to now, it is impossible to trace what happened with him after this very important anathematisation, but at least the fact that he was not buried in his monastery, but rather in Mar Atqen Monastery, gives us reasons to consider the effect of this conciliar document of anathematisation.

We do not have the documents of the council. What we can evoke is only a conciliar letter, transmitted by the "Nomocanon of 'Abdisho bar Brikha'[2], which mentions the condemnation, and an Arab translation (a summary) of the anathema of the mystics[3]. And yet, we have a panorama that Elijah of Nisibis gives us, in the 11th century. Doing a description of the council, the author points out to an important element – there was a number of Christians who believed and professed that the Man assumed from Mary "sees" the eternal Lord. In consequence, a big gathering (formed of 16 metropolitans, 30 bishops[4], numerous monks, savants and notable Christians) excommunicated all who believed that it was possible for human to have an ocular or intellectual vision of the eternal Verb, in this world or in the world to come[5]. From the document of Ibn at-Tayyib, one can observe that there is no clear motivation for John the Solitary's condemnation. For John Dalyatha, the Arab translator shows that he was condemned for his Modalist

[1] See J. B. Chabot, *Livre de chasteté compose par Jesusdenah*. *Mélanges d'archéologie el d'histoire* XVI (1896), 1-79; and P. Bedjan, *Liber superiorum* (Paris, 1901), 437-517; French translation in J. B. Chabot, *Livre de chasteté*, 225-91 (with index of names); here, n. 125, 54-55.

[2] Vittorio Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I († 823) patriarca cristiano di Baghdad. Ricerche sull'epistolario e sulle fonti contigue* (Paris, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 41, Chrétiens en terre d'Iran 3), 190-193.

[3] *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clemetino Vaticana* III.1 (Roma, 1725), 100; Wilhelm Hoenerbach and Otto Spies*, Ibn at-Tayyib, Fiqh an-Nasraniya*. *Das Rech der Christenheit* (Louvain, 1957), CSCO, 167-168, 185-187 (187-188).

[4] The contemporary scholars question the possibility of so many representatives being present (see Vittorio Berti, *Vita e studi di Timoteo I*, 192-193).

[5] Élie bar Šennaya, *Kitab-al-Majalis*, evoked by Khalil Samir, "Entretien d'Élie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn' Alī sur l'unité et la trinité", *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979): 31-117 (here p. 90, n. 17). The anathemas have been already analysed by Antoine Guillaumont and Robert Beulay. For Joseph Hazzaya: A. Guillaumont, "Sources de la doctrine de Joseph Hazzāyā", *Oriens Syrien* 3.1 (1958): 3-24; Robert Beulay, "Joseph Hazzaya", *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* VIII, col. 1341-1349; for John Dalyatha: Robert Beulay, *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean le Dalyatha, mystique syro-oriental du VIIIe siècle* (Paris,1990), and recently by Alexandre Treiger, "Could Christ's Humanity See his Divinity? An Eight Century Controversy between John of Dalyatha and Timothy I, Catholikos of the Church of the East", *Journal of Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 2-3.

Trinitarian phraseology, naming the Son and the Holy Spirit divine "powers" of the Father, instead of persons, while Joseph Hazzaya was accused of Messalianist thesis:

- In order to receive the Holy Spirit one does not need to attend the offices, but to pray in hidden places;
- The perfect man does not need prayer anymore;
- The consecration of bread and wine by the Holy Spirit during incessant prayer; and
- The vision of divinity.

The last part of the text underlines the main reason for the condemnation of the three mystics, the source of the other accusations: Mar Timothy anathematised all those who asserted that the "nature of Christ could see His divinity and those who said that it might be seen by some created beings. Consequently, he added that there was no human perfection in this world and the souls were not able to feel anything after leaving the body upon their return after the Judgement".

Accepting that Christ's humanity is not able to see his divinity means asserting the impossibility for any human being of seeing God. This thesis came against the mystics' claim to see God, a constant of monastic theology[6]. From a

[6] If we are to make a retrospective, we will point to some important voices from the Antiochene tradition as well as from the East Syriac space, evoked by Robert Beulay in his monograph dedicated to John of Dalyatha: John Chrysostom, although he does not accept any vision of God's essence, points to the possibility of communicating with Christ's resplendence of His glorified humanity; for Theodore of Mopsuestia, God's nature is made visible under a form adapted to man's capacity, in the corporeal Man Jesus. Divinity acts by such means. The possibility of divine vision reflects only seeing its image in the body of Christ; Theodoret of Cyrus asserts that God reveals Himself in a real way in the corporal humanity of Christ. Divine nature becomes visible in Christ's nature by means of his power manifested in the miracles and in Church's sacraments; Ephrem uses the apophatic language while interpreting Moses' life and argues that, while Moses had the vision of God's glory, he knew that seeing means not seeing. Human cannot see God's essence, but his glory, because of God's condescendence by which he proportioned the vision of his glory to the human capacity of pertaining; another important author is Narsai. For him, Christ resplendent of glory will make humans able to see without seeing the Hidden Being. Christ's humanity, principle of divine essence among us, will be as an image for the exterior senses and, by means of mind, it will have some knowledge of the essence that remains invisible; Babai the Great, the radical East Syriac conservatory theologian, argues that there is a gradual knowledge of God. By means of symbols and images God reveals His justice and providence in the saints and more in Christ, in which dwells the plenitude of divinity. Borrowing the Evagrian language, he speaks about the knowledge of God in creation, the knowledge of the intelligible beings, by the elevation of soul above the earthly reality, so the contemplation of the corporals and intelligible beings and, finally, the knowledge of the Son, who surpasses all other knowledge by the unique knowledge of the Trinity, that we will see, but not in a vision. It is about the glory and the light of the face of Christ, mirror and image of the Essence of God. He also uses an apophatic language in the line of Pseudo Dionysius when he speaks about un-knowledge and union in the cloud with One who is unknowable. In fact, there is no knowledge, but a look

theological point of view, the possible explanation that stands behind this anathema is of Christological nature. The idea of divine vision brings forth the acceptance of communication between the natures in Christ. In this context, we can identify two suspicions that Timothy and the institutional theology had at that time – the fear of Monophysism, respectively, a kind of spiritualization of the body (of Jesus) up to Docetism (associated with Messalianism). This idea may be better advocated if we remember another important event colligated with the election of Nestorius as bishop of Bet Nuhadra, the biographer of Joseph Hazzaya, connected with the Monastery of Rabban Yozadaq. As an exponent of a charismatic community, before being elected bishop, he was asked by the party of ecclesiastical officials to make a profession of faith regarding the East Syriac Christology, in reference to the strict distinction between Christ's humanity and divinity and the eternal existence of the Verb (Word) vis-à-vis that of Man Jesus (against those who deny the humanity and the divinity of Jesus and, specifically, against the Monophysite and Chalcedonian Christology)[7], and, in consequence, against Messalianist theses. Finally, the profession points again to the three mystical consequences, essential for our discussion and three anathemas for those advocating them:

- The divine nature is incorporeal, limitless and invisible, while the human nature is corporal, limited and visible; so, in Christ, there is no possibility for human nature to experience the vision of the divine nature;
- Advocating a divine vision means accepting a changing and transformation of the natures in Jesus Christ or the spiritualisation of humanity, not acceptable for their theology; the human nature in Christ is simple and without composition;

without desire of knowing, a loving conscience of the absolute transcendence of God, constituting for human the supreme and beatific delectation (p. 423-440). I will add four important authors in matter of the mystics of vision: Evagrius, despite the fact that he clearly states that God is incomprehensible in Himself and His nature is unknowable, he also argues that the spiritual intellect is the visionary of the Holy Trinity and that a real theologian is the one who sees God/ Evagre le Pontique, *Les six centuries des Kephalaia Gnostica d'Evagre le Pontique*, ed. Antoine Guillaumont, PO (Paris: Brepols, 1958), 5.51-52, 57, 63; 3.30 ; 5.26; Pseudo Macarius, in the Syriac translation, speaks about the vision of God, giver of life, with the hidden eye of our intelligence, safeguarding God's transcendence that surpasses all vision; the cognitive eye of the inner man is fixed on the insatiable, splendid, unknowable and completely incomprehensible Beauty, so that soul is absorbed in love by this divine nature (see Robert Beulay, *Jean de Dalyatha*, 442); Gregory of Nyssa, using an apophatic language, points to the transcendence of God, while stating also the possibility of seeing him during the limitless progression in the union with God/ Gregorio di Nissa, *La vita di Mosè*, a cura di Manlio Simonetti (Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, Arnoldo Mondatori Editore, 1996), § 220, 227, 235; in the same way, the darkness, in the language of Dionysius, is not equivalent to the absence of divine vision. He speaks more about a super vision, bringing together the un-knowledge and the divine vision in the darkness (*Mystical theology*, I.1 PG 3, 997B, I.3, PG 3, 1000A; *The divine names*, I.4, PG 3, 592C).

[7] For details see Vittorio Berti, "Grazia, visione e natura in Nestorio di Nuhadra, solitario e vescovo siro-orientale", *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 10 (2005): 229-232.

- In the mystical realm, there is no perfection in this world while being in the body and there is no knowledge or action out of the body[8].

We can easily observe that Nestorius' abjuration and profession of faith reflects the same salient points problematic in Timothy's council. These are the consequences of a Christological vision that, colligated to a specific anthropology, develops in a certain courageous and non-institutional mystical school.

The Tripartition of the Spiritual Life

Joseph Hazzaya remains an important exponent, especially for his spiritual theology. He portrays the ascetic path in three moments called "stages", "orders", "levels" or "places/ spheres", expressed in two different series that interpenetrate and overlap each other:

- Corporeal stage (ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ) – sphere of purification (ܡܕܒܪܐ ܕܟܝܟܘܟ)
- Psychic stage (ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ) – sphere of limpidity/ serenity (ܡܕܒܪܐ ܕܫܠܝܐ)
- Spiritual stage/ spirituality (ܡܕܒܪܢܘܬܐ) – sphere of perfection (ܡܕܒܪܐ ܕܓܡܝܪܐ)[9].

The first stage assimilated to the novitiate in coenobitic life includes vocal prayers, ascetic labours in order to free from passions – philautia[10], akedia[11], fornication[12], judgement against the brothers and the superiors[13] and vain glory[14]. It is about the process of purification that aims at attaining a "natural state" and the vision of natural knowledge hidden in creation. One finds it necessary to point that, for Joseph, the natural condition refers to the initial good state and not the corrupted condition after Adam's fall. There are good powers that have to be activated in the personal good-workings.

The sphere of limpidity, which implies a hermitical life, includes the practice of inner virtues, unceasing prayer, peace and certainty that generates compassion towards all. In the cognitive plan, contemplation takes higher forms – of the incorporeal, judgment and providence.

---

[8] Cf. Oscar Braun, "Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9 Jahrhunderts", *Oriens Christianus* 1 (1901): 299-313 (here 301-309); "Briefe des Katholikos Timotheos I", in *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902): 1-32; 3 (1903): 1-15.

[9] Cf. A. Mingana, *Early Christian Mystics*, Woodbrooke Studies 7, 263-269 (150-158).

[10] Giuseppe Hazzaya, *Le tappe sulla vita spirituale*, (Monastero di Bose: Qiqajon, 2011), 67-68, § 11.

[11] *Le tappe*, 119-120, § 88.

[12] *Le tappe*, 119-122, § 88-90.

[13] *Le tappe*, 121, § 89.

[14] *Le tappe*, 121-122, 128-129, § 90, 100.

The third stage, the spiritual stage pertains to the activity of the intellect, beyond all kinds of works. It is the place of perfection and the highest level of contemplation – the vision of Christ and the Holy Trinity in shapeless light. In this stage it is not so much about the specific ascetic synergy, but rather a growth in spiritual passivity, where the action is generated by God Himself and alone. It is the partaking to the Spirit that activates the gifts of Baptism in what he calls "supernatural state" and the most specific manifestation is stupor (ܪܥܝܡܐ), as a response to God's loving intervention.

The very source for this tripartite spiritual itinerary is John the Solitary. Using as starting point Saint Paul's anthropology (1 Thessalonians 5:23), he counterparts the Greek terms *sarkikos*, *phychikos* and *pneumatikos* with the Syriac *pagrana*, *naphshana* and *ruhana*, translated as "on the level of the body, soul, respectively, of the spirit"[15]. Adding the suffix "utha", he points to three stages: somatic (against nature), dominated by carnal passions[16]; psychic/noetic, according to nature/ natural, transitory to the spirituality of angels, which means a rough physical and intellectual asceticism; and spiritual, above nature, which is communion with God, a foretaste of the future world. Here, one deals with what John calls purity (*dakyuta*), limpidity (*shaphyuta*) and perfection (*gmiruta*). In other words, the progress from the level of the body to that of the soul can be interpreted as interiorisation (the birth of the inner person). The border between the level of the soul and the spiritual level is marked by what he calls "limpidity" (*shaphyuta*), which describes the self-emptying of the interior and combines the purity with clarity and lucidity.

Regarding the methodology, one can identify a major difference between Joseph's vision and that of John's. Robert Beulay argues that there is a change from a modal way of understanding the spiritual life's tripartition, specific to John the Solitary, to an objective way, theorised by Joseph and not only[17]. If for John the body, the soul and the spirit are mostly successive principles that rule the way of thinking, for Joseph the three stages are not so much modes of

[15] *Dialogues sur l'âme e les passions des hommes* 13-14, Orientalia Christiana Analecta (Roma, 1939).

[16] The practical stage of Evagrius, which presupposes an ascetic lifestyle, does not correspond to John's bodily stage, used to describe those who have no divine knowledge, but refers already to the psychical stage, or the bodily and, partially, the noetic conduct. For John, escaping bodily life means turning towards the other world and transforming jealousy, characteristic for the bodily stage, into a sense of justice. The psychic person turns from an excessive concern of the body towards the soul, and is concerned with the practice of virtuous acts and penitence. And, finally, perfection consists in the knowledge of the spirit. See *Johannes von Lycopolis: Ein Dialog über die Seele und die Affekte des Menschen*, ed. by Sven Dedering (Upssala: Arbeten utgina med understöd av Vilhelm Ekmans universitetsfond), 66.

[17] Robert Beulay, *La lumière sans forme. Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale* (Chevtogne, 1987), 102-125.

acting, but rather three objects of actions, specific spaces where one manifests his ascetic life in collaboration with divine grace. Joseph starts the spiritual itinerary from the point one has already left the world. From here commences the work of purification. Then follows the psychic stage, where the ascetic work is correlated to the soul. This stage goes up to limpidity and the contemplation of the immaterial beings. To the spiritual stage corresponds the perfection with the contemplation of the light of the Holy Trinity.

The tripartite schema of "the workings of grace of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ" is detailed by the same author in eleven stages that are not really given actual names so as not to engage too much in theoretical speculation, but to give space to the reality of experience. I will evoke them at short, using the synthesis done by Serafim Sepälä:

- The stage of complete physical and psychical rest – maximum of quietude;
- The stage of workings of intuitions – against distraction of mind; the recitation of Psalms and prostrations before the Cross are recommended;
- The stage of the love of Psalms and of recitation – freeing the mind from vain glory;
- The stage of the flow of tears and continual prostrations before the Cross. This is the boundary between purity and limpidity;
- The stage of contemplation of divine judgement and providence, continual prayer. Christ is identified in all;
- The stage of impulses of light and fire stirrings in the heart, while the Spirit operates in the senses of smell and taste;
- The state of hearing the voice of glorification – stirrings of the world to come; the mind participates to the Cherubim's praise;
- The stage when the mind is silenced and swallowed up in the light of the vision of lofty and sublime contemplation; the mind is mingled with the divine visitation;
- The stage of clothing oneself with fire in which one sees oneself as fire and receives knowledge concerning the world to come. The affected senses are sight and touch;
- The stage "inexpressible in a letter", in which one feels joy and sheds tears without knowing why; the active senses are touch, sight and smell, but the distinctions between them are, in a way, blurred;
- The stage of flow of spiritual speech, during which hearing is active[18].

[18] For details see Serafim Sepälä, *In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature*, Studia Orientalia 98 (2003), 128-129.

The Tripartite Spiritual Itinerary and the Monastic Life

Regarding the construction of his theological discourse, one may notice from the very beginning that it has a very practical scope correlated with the monastic life. Thus, the initial point is the *flight from the world*, embracing monastic life. Entering the monastery, the "coenobium", signifies the initiation in the bodily stage. One primary condition is to forget the world and to focus on the heavenly things. Regarding the progress, this is a necessary step from one stage to another; nobody can reach the highest state without passing through those that are before. These two principles are well connected – leaving the world signifies adopting a new style of living, so, in consequence, nobody can go further in the monastic life without forgetting the world. I will quote a short fragment: "Not everyone who has come out of the world is released from his conducts. Many have come out of the world in the outward appearance, but they continue according to their lifestyle. That is why I have said there are two exits from the world. Persons who have left the world, you will find many, but released from their conducts one from thousand"[19].

Joseph mentions some factors that determine this first movement. The first one is represented by what he calls "the natural seeds" put by God in human in his initial nature[20]. Immediately comes the second movement generated by the guardian angel that confirms the inner natural seed of doing good (§ 7). The calling for monastic life pertains to the highest spiritual level of perfection. So as to illustrate this aspect, Joseph uses the Scripture and interprets contextually the different callings Christ does to the monastic life: Mt. 19:21; Mc. 8:34; Mt. 6:34; Mt. 6:24 (§ 8). These verses are means for the inner love that generate such a decision and, consequently, a specific ascetic behavior (§ 9-10). Once this decision is taken, the first ascetic struggle is against philautia, specific for the worldly behavior that encompasses: gratifications, renunciation to the material goods, glory, power, and adopting forward the condition of the stranger, poverty and even misery. It is, symbolically speaking, the flying from Egypt towards the "Promised Land" (§ 11-18). Next to this sensible flying, Joseph adds the necessity of intelligibly leaving out the world (§ 19). One can identify here the object of spiritual progress – from the bodily to the noetic asceticism.

Here begins the bodily stage, with the entrance in the coenobium[21]. Again, symbolically speaking, the communitarian life in coenobium pertains to

[19] *Le tappe,* 71, § 19.

[20] *Le tappe,* 64, § 6; see also Evagrius, *Gnostikos*, I, 39-40; *Praktikos* 57.

[21] According to Abraham of Kashkar's Monastic Rules, the monastery implies two types of life – communitarian (coenobium) and hermitic (cell). There are two terms that describe the former type – "Umra" (ܥܡܪܐ) and "Daira" (ܕܝܪܐ) – convent and monastic complex (*laura*). Inside the monastery we find two distinct forms of life: communitarian for the years of initiation into monastic life (ܡܨܥܝ), and the life in solitude in separate cells (ܥܡܝܩ / ܫܠܝܐ or ܟܗܦܐ, cave,

the life in the desert of the people of Israel (§ 20). In a narrative way, the monastic life is presented using the biblical symbols that are present in the Book of Exodus. For example, when speaking about necessary obedience for monastic life, he mentions Joshua and Caleb, or disobedience Core, Dathan and Abiram (§ 24-27). Two of the monastic plagues are clearly mentioned in the next chapters, correlated with the Israel's attitude – to grumble against God, and, immediately after, the cultivation of bad thoughts, pictured by the snakes in the desert (§ 28-29). The symbol of the cross powerfully appears here – as a way of healing of spiritual illnesses and, at the same time, as a symbol for monastic life, in general (§ 30). Successively he mentions five important virtues to work for – silence, poverty, love, fasting and vigil (§ 34-35). An important aspect is represented by the relation between the spiritual father and his disciples. One needs a "master" to guide the younger brothers so as to bring an equilibrium, a moderation, in the fervent attitude of the latter category. Otherwise the vain glory may destroy all the good works they do:

> "A questo punto è richiesta una guida sapiente, che corregga la gioia di questa tappa con l'umiliazione e la tristezza con la speranza delle promesse (fondate) sulla misericordia... Poiché se il fratello a questo punton non ha una guida, o i demoni lo esaltano con la vanagloria, e distruggono il suo inteletto con le immagini che gli dipingono davanti, o lo gettano nella tristezza, nell'angoscia e nella disperazione, e lo riportano verso l'Egitto della malvagità[22]."

During this second stage Joseph insists that on the classic monastic advice regarding a moderate attitude reflected in what the ascetic theology calls "discernment". The monastic rule has to be taught "with discipline and moderation… so as not to exaggerate and the fervor of their love not to become insensible" (§ 47). The fervor of the young brothers is good, but it can generate confusions and can bring spiritual falling if, because of it, some stages are omitted in the way to spiritual perfection. Thus, the role of the spiritual guides is essential and, consequently, the obedience of the novices is firmly requested.

---

often being carved into the rock). Coenobium included the central church, refectory with kitchen (bread oven), food storage, cells for novices and those who were administering the monastery. Regarding the second form, the cells were near the monastery, and those living there used to add to the community on Sundays and holidays to participate in the liturgy and take communion. Thus Syriac monastic terminology differentiates between the two successive forms of life – "dairaya" (ܕܝܪܝܐ) and "ihidaya" (ܝܚܝܕܝܐ). Referring to the governance of the monastery one speaks about an abbot/ superior (ܪܒܐ), assisted by a parsimonious (ܦܣܩܐ). Abraham's Rules mention also a third instrument of authority – the brothers' congregation/ community (ܟܢܘܫܝܐ)/ in Sabino Chialà, *Abramo di Kashkar e la sua comunità* (Bose: Qiqajon, 2005), 159-167.

[22] *Le tappe*, 84, § 41.

The psychic stage is associated with the movement of the novices from the coenobium to the cell. This occurs not in an objective way immediately, but requires a personal appropriation of an ascetic living and inner transformation:

> "None of the lazy and negligent should think that, thanks to the vigil of consecration celebrated by his brother in the cell[23], he reaches the rest and the tranquility, if in the Coenobium he had not been thoroughly exercised in humility and in obedience towards his fathers and spiritual brothers. It does occur only with the one who practiced that in the coenobium to search for the peace in the cell"[24].

Symbolically, this movement is correlated with the double passing on the other side of Jordan River of the Israel people (§ 64). The bodily asceticism continues in this stage, only that the emphasis is placed on the soul's virtues. An important role is occupied by reading of the Scripture, the observation of the liturgy of the hours (§ 74-75, 85), the reading of the Church Fathers (§75, 84) and the manual work (§77). The vices to struggle against become more subtle in this stage, considered to be of the soul, on the base of the soul's unity with the body – acedia (ܪܚܝܩܐ ܕܠܒܐ), fornication (ܙܢܝܘܬܐ), anger (ܟܥܣܐ), vain glory (ܣܦܝܩܐ ܕܫܒܚܐ), sadness (ܥܪܩܘܬܐ), desperation, anxiety (§ 88-91), envy and restlessness (§ 101). For all this cases one needs a spiritual Father and the gift of discernment. The struggle against passions describes one side of this stage, but it is not the end, as the hermit if gifted with different spiritual consolations – intellections (ܡܫܟܚܐ) that move the mind towards tears, peace and humbleness (so called "of the right side"), as works of the grace (§ 102), the contemplation of the immaterial beings, of God's Judgment and Providence (§ 137), the vision of the two worlds – of the passed and the future things (§ 140).

The last stage, the spiritual stage, pertains completely to the noetic realm. It is about one's mind vision, prepared by the contemplation of the immaterial beings, of the divine justice and providence. This itinerary is the distinctive sign for this state. In Joseph's words, it is about "the vision of your mind, united to invisible powers, commingled only to the glorious light of the Holy Trinity" (§142). If the contemplation described in the former stage presupposed an important human involvement, the spiritual contemplation is mostly passive with "Christ all in all" (Col. 3:11). The intellect is overwhelmed by the Spirit "that leads him". It has no anymore power in it, when reaching the spirituality stage, but one only regards the contemplations that come one after another (§ 144). In the last paragraphs he tries to argue the possibility to reach this state and strengthens

[23] For the ritual of the celebration of the cell see Simone Tabutheh, *Abitare la solitudine: discorso per la consacrazione della cella* (Bose: Qiqajon, 2004).
[24] *Le tappe*, 99, § 66.

his arguments with the example of Saint Paul who experienced this (2 Corinthians 12). Using Paul's description, he asserts that in those very moments the mind does not belong to him anymore, as its spirituality coexists with the holy light in which it is clothed and is not capable anymore to distinguish it from that (§ 146). Next to the light, which belongs to the future reality, Joseph adds the concept of peace, as a result of the presence of light (§ 147). Symbolically this moment represents the glorious Zion, the scope of the very itinerary of Israel people.

In the last three paragraphs of the text, he makes a very systematic summary of the three stages in correspondence with the monastic itinerary. I will quote a short fragment:

> "These are, in summary, the things that we have written down by the sake of your charity, according to the request you have addressed to me, oh my brother, using for our speech the Egypt, which is a symbol of this world, and making the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt image for our entry into the coenobium and the bodily stage. Our dwelling in the cell, our struggle against passions, the fighting and visits of the grace we have identified them in the crossing of Jordan by the children of Israel and in their entry into the Promised Land. We have also introduced a subdivision into the psychic stage, the one in which the solitary experiences all the virtues of the conduct of thought and reaches the place of limpidity. The place above the limpidity we then indicated in Zion, which is the stage of spirituality (§ 148)".

Conclusion

The spiritual itinerary proposed by Joseph Hazzaya has a very practical sense[25], despite its technical expression that comes as secondary. Contextualising his experience, being addressed to his brothers, he needs a theological vocabulary known and accessible to his fellows in the line of a specific tradition, in particular John the Solitary and Evagrius. As the name of his main work says, he writes a letter on the stages that a monk may follow, observing the possible spiritual growing, step by step, commencing from the fights of the body against material passions up to the spiritual state. Faithful to his East Syriac tradition, in matter of the great biblical influence, he uses the image of the people of Israel exodus from Egypt and its way to the Promise Land[26] so as to express the monastic life, in particular, and of Christian life, in general. The process might be described as a gnoseological endeavour up to the divine knowledge.

[25] And personal too, coming out from his own experience. Even his name suggests this personal dimension of his writings as "hazzaya" means "seer" of the divine reality.

[26] This symbolical interpretation is quite common in the ascetic theology, from Gregory of Nyssa and his "De vita Moysis" onwards.

In the bodily stage one fights against material passions while he is still connected with material representations. It is the time of purification and the biblical colour associated with it is the zephyr, similar with the sky colour (Exodus 24:10)[27]. The highest point here is the inner vision of itself of the intellect, the initial state before Adam's falling. In the psychic stage, the bodily struggles transform more into inner struggles. Human, once materially purified, receives the intellections, inner perceptions regarding nature (the natural primary contemplation), immaterial beings (natural secondary contemplation), the contemplation of the divine judgement and providence. The prominent symbol for this stage is the fire that fulfils the process of purification. The spiritual stage is inaugurated by the limpidity. At this point, next to the intellections, comes the divine vision – the vision of the divine glory, "the light of the Holy Trinity", the light without form[28], the light of Christ. Here, one identifies the role of Incarnation at the base of human's capacity to partake the divine vision. It is, finally, the foretaste of the new world, the state after resurrection. In fact, it is, practically and liturgically speaking, the development of the divine life communicated potentially in the baptism.

REFERENCES

Bedjan, P., ed. *Liber superiorum*. Paris, 1901.

Berti, V. "Grazia, visione e natura in Nestorio di Nuhadra, solitario e vescovo siro-orientale." *Annali di Scienze Religiose* 10 (2005): 219-257.

Berti, V. *Vita e studi di Timoteo I († 823) patriarca cristiano di Baghdad. Ricerche sull'epistolario e sulle fonti contigue*, Cahiers de Studia Iranica 41, Chrétiens en terre d'Iran 3. Paris, 2009.

Beulay, R. *L'enseignement spirituel de Jean le Dalyatha, mystique syro-oriental du VIII^e siècle*. Paris, 1990.

Beulay, R. "Joseph Hazzaya." *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité* VIII, col. 1341-1349.

Robert Beulay. *La lumière sans forme. Introduction à l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale.* Chevtogne, 1987.

Braun, O. "Ein Brief des Katholikos Timotheos I über biblische Studien des 9 Jahrhunderts." *Oriens Christianus* 1 (1901): 299-313.

Braun, O. "Briefe des Katholikos Timotheos I." *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902): 1-32; 3 (1903): 1-15.

[27] On the spiritual signification of the colour see Gabriel Bunge, "Le «lieu de la limpidité». A propos d'un apophtegme énigmatique: Budge II, 494", *Irenikon*, 1 (1982): 7-18.

[28] For details see Robert Beulay, *La lumière sans forme. Introduction a l'étude de la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*, Chevtogne, 1987.

Bunge, G. "Le « lieu de la limpidité». A propos d'un apophtegme énigmatique: Budge II, 494." *Irenikon*, 1 (1982): 7-18.

Chabot, J. B. *Livre de chasteté compose par Jesusdenah*. *Mélanges d'archéologie el d'histoire* XVI (1896) : 1-79.

Chialà, S. *Abramo di Kashkar e la sua comunità*. Bose: Qiqajon, 2005.

Evagre le Pontique. *Les six centuries des Kephalaia Gnostica d'Evagre le Pontique*, edited by Antoine Guillaumont, PO. Paris: Brepols, 1958.

Gregorio di Nissa. *La vita di Mosè*, a cura di Manlio Simonetti. Fondazione Lorenzo Valla, Arnoldo Mondatori Editore, 1996.

Guillaumont, A. "Sources de la doctrine de Joseph Hazzāyā." *Oriens Syrien* 3.1 (1958): 3-24.

Hazzaya, G. *Le tappe sulla vita spirituale*. Monastero di Bose: Qiqajon, 2011.

Hoenerbach, W.; Spies, O. *Ibn at-Tayyib, Fiqh an-Nasraniya*. *Das Rech der Christenheit*. Louvain, 1957, CSCO 167-168.

Jean le Solitaire. *Dialogues sur l'âme e les passions des hommes* 13-14. Orientalia Christiana Analecta. Roma, 1939.

Johannes von Lycopolis: Ein Dialog über die Seele und die Affekte des Menschen. Edited by Sven Dedering. Upssala: Arbeten utgina med understöd av Vilhelm Ekmans universitetsfond.

Mingana, A. *Early Christian Mystics*. Woodbrooke Studies 7.

Samir, K. "Entretien d'Élie de Nisibe avec le vizir Ibn' Alī sur l'unité et la trinité." *Islamochristiana* 5 (1979): 31-117.

Sepälä, S. *In Speechless Ecstasy: Expression and Interpretation of Mystical Experience in Classical Syriac and Sufi Literature*. Studia Orientalia 98 (2003).

Simone Tabutheh. *Abitare la solitudine: discorso per la consacrazione della cella.* Bose: Qiqajon, 2004.

Treiger, A. "Could Christ's Humanity See his Divinity? An Eight Century Controversy between John of Dalyatha and Timothy I, Catholikos of the Church of the East." *Journal of Canadian Society for Syriac Studies* 9 (2009): 2-14. *Bibliotheca Orientalis Clemetino Vaticana* III.1, Roma, 1725, 100.